

Sketch by Dede Lyon

Our museum is located in the great Eastern Sierra Nevada Mountains of California.

Our culture of the Washoe people, agricultural era, and silver mining of the surrounding areas display our pioneering history of Alpine County.

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The Big Tree Road is a follow up on the story Bear Valley by Eric Jung Original article published Volume X Number 2 Fall 2004 Alpine Review



# ALPINE REVIEW

Volume XXVI, Issue 4

November 2020

### THE BIG TREE ROAD

AN OVERVIEW

By: FRANK TORTORICH

The Big Tree Road is different from some of the other Trails we study for two basic reasons. First, it was not a major Emigrant Trail and was not used until 1856. Second, it was built as a road, was not a trail that later became a road as many of the other trails we study became.

Merchants in the southern mines and Stockton financed this endeavor to bring gold seekers to the southern mines and increase their economic base.

In the spring of 1855, the California legislature passed a bill that "provided for a survey and construction of a wagon road from the Sacramento Valley to the eastern boundary of California."

On July 26, 1855, California State Surveyor General Seneca Hunt Marlette received a letter from Calaveras County requesting support for the state to survey a route beyond the Calaveras Big Trees.

Marlette responded by saying that there was not enough money to survey that route and they would have to take the initiative themselves.

The town of Murphys raised \$500 and on August 8,1855, sent out O. B. Powers to survey (explore for) the Big Tree Route. (Murphys took its name from members of the 1844 Stevens party who were the first to cross the Sierra with wagons.) <sup>1</sup>

By O.B. Powers to Marlette November 25, 1855:

Our party consisting of Dr. N.C. Conglon, A.H. Hall, J. Thornton, L.W. Noyes, J.S. Niswander and H. Capron, together with a Mexican named Lemon for packing. They left the Town of Murphys at one o'clock in the afternoon on 8th of August.

The Big Tree Road continued on page 7

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# **Historical Society** of Alpine County

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## President's Message

BY: TOM SWEENEY

Hello Fellow Historical Society Members,



This is your November 2020 Quarterly Alpine Review. Although there has been nearly nothing happening, wait but there has been, Barbara Howard has been diligently kept up on the watering schedule. So here is a big THANK YOU for Barbara.

Nothing has changed in the buildings or the grounds since we were shutdown. We still have all our plans just waiting in the wings. Isn't it funny we're getting nothing done but we keep adding items to the list?

Since we are officially closed for the year, we are planning for the 2021 Membership Drive to start very soon, the February and May Quarterly meetings, opening of the summer season Memorial Day weekend. Markleeville History Walk, Silver Mountain City Tour. I can smell the bread and cinnamon rolls baking in the brick oven and tables full of potluck delights. All that depends on the County being open by then.

Everyone should start making plans to visit the Museum Complex and see all the changes that we should have completed by then. Any comments would be appreciated also anyone who would like to volunteer time will not be turned away. No experience necessary just send us a note or give us a call and we will get back to you.

Here are a few pictures of what we hope you will not see when we open. As a test, can you notice any changes so far?



See you when we can. Tom



# A Sneak Peak inside the Museum...









## **CURATOR'S CORNER**

by: Kristiina Wiedenhoft

Now that we are heading into winter and nearing the end of 2020, it almost feels like a completely different time to me, almost... dare I say ... "normal." This would be the time of year when I would be working alone in the museum anyways, beginning new projects and making changes and upgrades while we are closed for the winter. And now that I get to go back to that mindset, it feels almost like a comforting sense of normalcy. Even though we had to remain closed all summer, we are still standing, unlike so many around other museums the country. Museums have taken an exceptionally hard hit this year, many unable to survive having virtually no revenue for the majority of the Most museums rely not only daily year. admissions, but events, fundraisers, and gift shop sales. And while most have been completely closed and gatherings have been strictly limited, it has been difficult for many to stay afloat. We have certainly felt the hit, too, but we are lucky to be able to keep moving forward from here. It has been a strange and difficult year with constant uncertainty, never ending changes, and new protocols and guidelines. This season has focused more on how and when we could reopen safely, all while navigating the constant changes and uncertainties. But while we had to skip a season this year, we will certainly be back open again soon.

So, for now, I am looking forward to the future. Since our original Closing Day for 2020 has now come and gone, I am refocusing my efforts on Opening Day 2021. And putting forth all my efforts to making the museum the

best I can and to be able to finally get to share that with the public again. All the while, I will be



prioritizing the safety of the public, our guests and volunteers. As proven this year, we have no idea what life may look like next year. We can be hopeful that we will be on the right track to a safer and healthier world again and we will plan accordingly. As much as myself and everyone else wanted to be able to open the museum year, there is nothing more important than the health and safety of the people of Alpine County and our visitors. And when we can get back to normal life, we will be thrilled to let you back in. But until then, we will progress and work towards the future and hopefully having Opening Day as scheduled in 2021.

So as always, thank you all for your support. And a special thank you to everyone who has made donations to the museum in the last few months! We have received photos, books, artifacts, and monetary donations, and not to mention all your historical society memberships. We greatly appreciate your generosity, and we are proud to preserve the many items we have received. Have a happy and safe winter, we cannot wait to have everyone back together again!

 $Website: \underline{www.alpinecountymuseum.org}$ 

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They spent the night near the site he referred to as the "world-renowned Big Tree." 1

He goes on to describe his journey up the mountains.

We entered a very large valley which, from the signs of bears which we discovered, we called Grizzly Bear Valley (Bear Valley)."<sup>2</sup> Here we are northeast from Murphys about forty miles; thirty-one of which is a good traveled wagon road and the remainder will require but little to make it as good as any road in the state."<sup>3</sup>

Powers describes his journey dropping into a valley they name Pacific Valley, continuing into the Mokelumne Valley, now called Hermit Valley.

Leaving the Mokelumne Valley we start down the branch in a north-west direction winding around we reach the summit in about a mile. We cross a small ridge into Indian Valley some four miles from Mokelumne Valley. Indian Valley is very large, being some ten miles long and four miles wide. (Over-estimation of distance)

Here we found Indian tracks in abundance... we came upon ten or twelve squaws dressed in rabbit skins...Upon seeing us they started up and fled; but we headed them off upon giving to them that we meant no harm... We were approaching some rocks when some fifteen or twenty Indians armed with bows came out apparently ready for battle. Expecting a combat, we prepared for it, when much to our surprise one of them cried out "How do you do?" We found them to be very friendly, and many of them speaking

tolerable English, or rather Pike County lingo."4

From Indian Valley we went north, passing through a piece of thick timber and between Twin Lakes (Tamarack lake is a dammed lake when, at low water, reveals itself as TWO lakes.), we entered a small valley which we called "Charity Valley"; and passing out at the head, we reached what might be termed the pass, being the highest point on the whole route.

(Here it is obvious that this group was not taking altitude measurements. They missed the fact that between "Twin Lakes" and Charity Valley they are at what is today called Border Ruffian Flat, which is 8315 feet in elevation. This is the divide between the Carson River drainage and the Mokelumne River drainage. The pass Powers refers to is 7834 feet in elevation and separates Charity and Faith Valleys.)

#### Powers continues:

This point (his highest point) is about four miles from Indian Valley, and the road rises gradually the whole distance. The timber is almost the only obstacle in the way of its being now a good wagon road. The decent eastward (northward) is nearly, or quite, as easy as the western (southern) slope, neither one forming any obstacle to the passage of loaded teams. About a mile east of the pass, rising from the side of a smooth, round mountain, is a mass of conglomerate rock two hundred feet in height, having the appearance of a monument, which in honor of our county we called Calaveras Monument. (Not named on modern quads) It is an unmistakable landmark, standing entirely alone, with no other conglomerate

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Annual Report of Surveyor General, 1855, Document Vol. 5, Session of 1856; 187

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Ibid., 188, top

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Ibid., 188, bottom

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Ibid., 189

rock within three miles. After leaving the pass, which is about 10 miles north from the divide between the Stanislaus and Mokelumne rivers, we came into Faith Valley."<sup>5</sup>

From the report submitted by Judge Freeman taken from L.W. Noyes notes: From this - the main or summit pass - the traveler descends about one hundred feet, and enters the westerly (southerly) end of a valley or meadow about five miles long, to which the party gave the name 'Faith Valley'.

They traversed this valley about a mile, and leaving it upon the left or north side, descended a hill with an easy grade, perhaps two hundred in perpendicular measurement and struck the head of Hope Valley and two miles distance from the Carson Road.<sup>6</sup>

Referring back and continuing with Powers' report: After leaving the pass, which is about ten miles north from the divide between the Stanislaus and the Mokelumne rivers, we come into Faith Valley. This is the most beautiful, about one 2 mile wide and five in length, lying nearly east and west, (Faith Valley runs north and south) the west end curving a little to the south; very level and better stocked with grass and clover than 5 lbid., 189 6 lbid., 190 7 lbid., 327 any other place we saw. Through it runs a branch of the Carson River, branches of which are found in Indian and Charity Valleys.<sup>7</sup>

(Powers is confused here as the branch out of Charity Valley drains into Hot Springs Creek, which does eventually empty into the East Fork of the Carson. Indian Valley however drains into the Mokelumne River.)

Coming into the west (south) end of this valley (Faith) we followed it down about a

mile, when we passed over a small ridge into Hope Valley. Through it runs another branch of the Carson River emptying down the canyon. (This is the West Fork of the Carson River whose headwaters are the upper end of Faith Valley and the Red Lake basin.)

In the middle of the south end of Hope Valley is a hill which can be passed, with a good road, on either side; and at the north end of the hill we struck the Old Carson and Hangtown Road, along which are scattered fragments of wagons, carcasses and skeletons of horses, mules and oxen, etc. Hope Valley is about ten miles long and three miles wide, and it is plentifully supplied with grass and water. <sup>8</sup>

(Powers is off on some of his directions and most of his distances. But what they did show was that a viable wagon road was possible by generally following their exploring route). Just who were the first Emigrants to use the Big Tree Road is not clear but we do have some indication.

Sherman Day was a California legislature who served as the chairman of the Committee of Internal Improvement. It was this committee who had the responsibility of the wagon road surveys.

On September 20, 1855, Day submitted a report to the Surveyor General Marlette:

Dear Sir:

At your request I have examined, at different times during the past three months, several routes across the Sierra Nevada, with a view to the construction and improvement of an Immigrant Wagon Road, under the Act passed by the last legislature. These routes were examined merely by walking or riding over them or near them, but without a regular

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ibid., 190

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Ibid., 327

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Ibid., 190

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 190, bottom

survey, and without use of instruments, except in a few cases, to obtain the bearings of prominent points, or to determine the grade at some of the more difficult places.<sup>9</sup>

(For the next few pages, Day goes on to describe all the existing routes and their potential for improvement.)

...Just previous to my last trip on the Old Carson Route, an exploring party from Calaveras County, in the vicinity of Murphy's, had passed through Hope Valley and Carson Canon, to explore a route between Carson Valley and Murphy's. As I did not meet them, I had no means of knowing definitely where they had examined, except from casual information obtained from immigrant parties.

(It is a mystery as to who these immigrants were and where they were going or coming from. Frances Bishop, a Calaveras researcher, stated in her papers that this is the first record of emigrants using the Calaveras route. It is more likely these emigrants were on the Carson route.)

Day continues:

I made, however a short excursion up the upper and southernmost head of Hope Valley, some five or six miles above where the Carson Road joins it, and on my return I have learned that this forms a part of their route. We crossed the summit between the head of Hope Valley fork of the Carson River and a tributary of the Mokelumne. The ascent on the north side was not difficult, nor excessively steep or rocky. A wagon might ascend it in its natural state. The elevation was apparently as great as the western summit on the Old Carson Route. 10

(I believe Day is describing Border Ruffian Flat, which is 8315 feet elevation, and West Pass is 9540 feet elevation.)

Further south, over a low ridge, we discern the two lakes mentioned in their report, and the route appeared not to be rough, but at a distance the canon of the Mokelumne River seemed to be deep and rugged. Not knowing the precise route they had passed over and having no sufficient party for the purpose, I returned.<sup>11</sup>

(Frances Bishop seemed to think this report documented the first emigrants to pass over this route. I think it is much too vague to determine or make that conclusion. However, there is a report on a group claiming to be the first emigrant party to use the Big Tree Route but not until after the Big Tree Road was built.)

Stockton businessmen subscribed \$5,000 to open the new road and divert traffic to it in Hope Valley. The roadwork took place in the summer of 1856. On August 16 the Calaveras Chronicle was able to report heavy work had been completed, including eight bridges, the largest being 75 feet long and 14 feet wide.<sup>12</sup>

A San Jose resident Dr. J.W. Reynolds wrote a letter to a San Jose newspaper of his 1856 trip to California. According to Frances Bishop, <sup>13</sup> Reynolds came to California in 1850 by another route and had returned east to bring his family out.

The letter is dated September 1856:

Mr. Editor, When I last wrote you I was in Fort Laramie... Our company, as known as the "Border Ruffian Train, [This is the first time I have read of a basis for the name for Border Ruffian Pass. ed.] consisting of 22

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Ibid., 77

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Ibid., 82, bottom

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Ibid., 83, top

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Howard, 95

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Frances Bishop Papers, Calaveras County Archives

men, seven ladies, and several children, left Westport on 10th of May and reached the town of Murphys on 26th of August...In Carson Valley we found plenty of trading post...Here we were met by some friends who conducted us through a New Pass over the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Ours had the honor of being the first train to cross this route.<sup>14</sup>

In a follow up letter dated February 26, 1857 he stated:

Our train consisted of 4 ox wagons, one mule wagon, and two carriages with mules.<sup>15</sup>

(The constructed road did not go through Indian Valley, as the exploring party went. The built road was such a good road that there was a push to make it the route for the Trans-Sierra Railroad. The San Andreas Independent writes numerous articles in 1857 on a Big Tree Road Convention and the results of their meetings of which all are promoting the importance of this route.)

A letter from Murphys to the editor of the San Andreas Independent, April 2, 1857, states:

The maps of the route prepared by L.W. Noyes of this place show conclusively that a rail route is possible... As it was chiefly to his efforts that we are indebted to his efforts for the making of the exploring party of 1855 and as the Pass (Border Ruffian) was discovered by him in advance of all the rest... While engaged on the road he found a new cutoff, by which the necessity of passing through Indian Valley was obviated.

The Big Tree Road over Border Ruffian Pass had its share of traffic up until 1859 when the Comstock Lode was discovered in Virginia City, Nevada.

<sup>14</sup> San Andreas Independent, reprinted Reynolds letter on Saturday, February 7, 1857

Gold and silver mines were being discovered all along the east side of the Sierra. A more direct route to these mines was necessary. A route going due east out of Hermit Valley over Ebbetts Pass was opened so travel over the Border Ruffian route was beginning to wane.

Starting in 1859, the Amador-Carson Valley Wagon Road (Carson Pass Route) was to be improved, eliminating the steepness of the Red Lake Grade climb to Caron Pass. The Carson Spur was blasted in eliminating the circuitous route over the 9540-foot high West Pass.

Silver City was just east over the mountains from Hermit Valley. Business people in Stockton and Murphys raised the necessary funds to build the road over the Sierra at what would be named Ebbetts Pass. The Ebbetts Pass Road was the reason for the Big Tree route segment from Hermit Valley by way of Blue Lakes, Border Ruffian Pass, and Hope Valley, to be used less and less and, eventually, abandoned.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I want to thank Harleigh Winkler, Lorrayne Kennedy and Santa Marrone of the Calaveras County Archives for their assistance in guiding me through the research process.

Bruce Thomson from California State Parks, Columbia.

A special thanks to Jim Carman for his many hours of research both at the Bancroft Library and in the field and for his sage advice in the editing of this document.

To Dave Johnson and Don Buck for sharing their knowledge and research

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> San Andreas Independent, reprinted March 7, 1857

information, additionally for Dave's help with the field research, I extend my gratitude.

Thank you to the numerous members of OCTA for their support of my outings doing Trail location and mapping, always making the work fun.

A special thanks to Earl Schmidt whose passion and enthusiasm encouraged me to delve deeper into the research on the Big Tree Trail.

And I can never forget my wife Mary Ann's patience, her art of trying to decipher my handwriting, and her computer skills, in helping to make this document into an attractive and readable effort. I am very proud to be working with my best friend.

Frank Tortorich, Jr. July, 2002

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## Secondhand Smoke

#### What is Secondhand Smoke?1,2

Secondhand smoke is a mix of two types of burning tobacco.

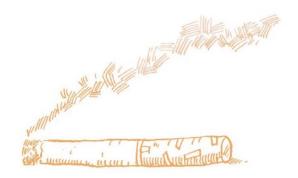
- One comes from the burning end of a cigarette, cigar, or pipe.
- The other is exhaled by a smoker.

#### Health Risks<sup>1,2</sup>

- Secondhand smoke can be as harmful as smoking.
  - » It has over 7,000 chemicals, about 70 of which can cause cancer.
  - » It kills over 41,000 non-smoking adults in the U.S. every year.
  - » It can cause heart disease, lung disease, stroke in non-smokers.
  - It can also cause cancer.
- · Secondhand smoke slows healing.
- Kids who breathe it get sick more often. They are at risk for:
  - Ear infections
  - Colds
  - Asthma attacks
  - Bronchitis and pneumonia
  - Coughing, wheezing
  - Shortness of breath
- · Babies are at higher risk for sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- · Secondhand smoke can harm pets, too.

#### **Limit the Risk**

- Any contact with secondhand smoke can be harmful. No level is safe.
- Keep your home and car smoke-free.
  - » In California, it is illegal to smoke in a car if anyone is under 18 years old.3
- · Ask people not to smoke in your home or car. Going to another room, or opening windows, is not enough.
- Make sure that no one smoke around your kids. Be firm.
- If you smoke, stop!



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<sup>1</sup> National Cancer Institute (2018). Secondhand Smoke and Cancer.

<sup>2</sup> CDC (2018). Secondhand Smoke (SHS) Facts.

<sup>3</sup> California Legislative Information. Health and Safety Code. Article 2.5. Smoking in Motor Vehides.

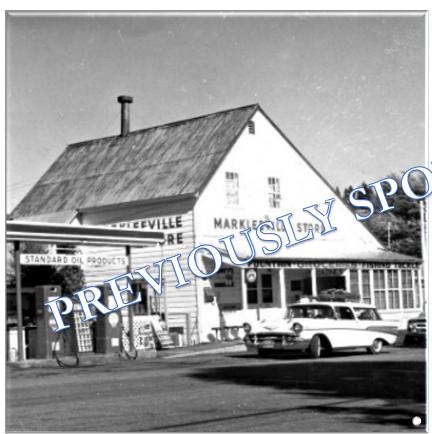
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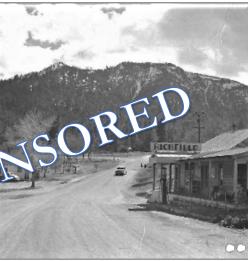


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## Miscellaneous Musing

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# 2020 Calendar of Events



All activities have been postponed postponed COVID-19.

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